



Fletcher presents \$1.4 M for heifer development program

By MISTY MAYNARD

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Governor Ernie Fletcher made an appearance at the Mason County Farmer Banker Field Day Thursday evening to present a check for nearly \$1.4 million to an area farming operation owned by Harold Burton.

The check, which will assist with the financing of a dairy heifer development program, represented combined funding from the Kentucky Agricultural Development Fund and the Kentucky Agricultural Finance Corporation.

"Agriculture is an extremely important part of our economy," Fletcher said just prior to presenting Harold Burton with the ceremonial check. "These are the kinds of projects I want to see."

Burton said he has been purchased calves, raising them, then shipping them back to large dairies for about 20 years. However, about two years ago, he began to expand to include other farmers in the area.

Burton said he has contracted with 15 dairies of various sizes and is currently raising 6,000 heifers. He contracts part of that work out to 35 farmers in six counties, including Mason, Fleming, Bracken, Rowan, Nicholas and Harrison.

"They want to make this a model program to help the farmers," said Burton, adding the funding is tobacco money that has been put to work for farmers.

According to information from Fletcher's communications office, Fletcher and the Kentucky legislature continue to make great strides toward lessening Kentucky's dependence on tobacco production while revitalizing the farm economy by investing 50 percent of Kentucky's Master Settlement Agreement into the Kentucky Agricultural Development Fund.

Kentucky has invested more than \$244 million in a variety of county, regional and state projects designed to increase farm income and create new farm-based business enterprises, according to the information from the communications office.

Prior to presenting the check, Fletcher mingled with the crowd at the field day, including greeting a 10-year-old boy who had once written his wife to thank her for her visit to his elementary school.

In the letter, the boy had said Fletcher's wife, Glenna, had inspired him to seek the office of president. Fletcher joked he was glad Hardy had chosen to pursue the presidency rather than become governor.

Being election year, Fletcher also did a little campaigning at the site, speaking on the issue of casino gambling.

Democratic candidate for governor, Steve Beshear has said he would bring casino gambling to the state, while Fletcher opposes gambling.

Fletcher noted that in areas where casino gambling is present, the crime rate is more than 80 percent higher than



Kentucky Gov. Ernie Fletcher talks with local farmers Thursday on the Burton Farm near May's Lick. -- Terry Prather/Staff

the national average. Gambling, he said, also increases divorce rates, bankruptcy rates, and has other negative effects.

"It's fools gold," he said.

Instead of trying to bolster the economy through gambling, Fletcher used the heifer project as an example of the kinds of jobs he intends to bring to the commonwealth.

"These are the kinds of jobs and opportunities I want to bring to Kentucky," he said.

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